

6 - Who's Side are you On?

Acts 5:12 - 42

Last night at the girls sectional game, I switched sides because it was "Lucky." I watch the first half on the east side of the gym, then switch at half time to watch the second half from the other side. Every time I've done this the girls have won. I mean, I'm not taking credit for the win, I'm just saying it could be a factor. But a few people from our church asked, "Didn't I just see you on the other side?" (I always hate to brag about my speed, how fast I am.)

But this brings me to an important question I need to ask today:

Who's side are you on?

Tonight there will be a football game played in the San Francisco Bay area. Perhaps you've heard about it? Fans will come dressed in their favorite team's colors and jerseys. There will be Broncos and Panthers in full force. It will be easy to tell who's side these fans are on.

But when it comes to serving God, there are times it can be difficult to know just who's side some people are on.

As we've been working our way through the book of Acts, we come to chapter 5 where God shows us the features He is looking for in His church. If we can demonstrate these features in our lives, we are going to be able to make a statement for who's side we are on.

As we saw last week with Ananias and Sapphira, the first feature God is looking for is...

PURITY

Since I talked about this last Sunday, I won't spend too much time recapping the story, but Ananias and Sapphira in the beginning verses of chapter 5, lied to the Holy Spirit. They were believers who were in the church. As far as the church knew, they were legitimate. They belonged. They were a part of everything.

But this couple decided they wanted to get in on the respect and the admiration that certain people like Barnabas were getting because Barnabas was selling what he had to provide money to meet the needs of people in the church. In the church, there was great love and great generosity and great unity. That's how chapter 4 ends.

So when chapter 5 begins, Ananias and Sapphira wanted to be among those who were admired and honored, and so they promised to sell a piece of property and give all the proceeds to the church for distribution to the needy saints. However, they kept back some of it and thus, they lied to the Holy Spirit. They were deceitful, and you remember the story. They showed up at church and they came to present their offering, their deceptive offering. First, Ananias dropped dead as God executed him in front of the whole church. A few hours later his wife showed up, and she dropped dead at the very time the young men were coming back into the service from having buried her husband.

The Lord was saying, "I want a pure church. I want a pure church."

This is so key because holiness is what validates the message. Holy is a church word that simply means "pure." If something is holy, it is set apart for God's specific use. And when Christians live pure lives, the world notices. If a Christian isn't pure, then everyone just thinks he or she is another hypocrite, and why would I want to go to church if I'm already better than that person.

Awhile back I told you about the guy standing in the Golden Coral covered in 1000 Island dressing...

It's a shame people in restaurants tell you the worst crowd to wait on is the Sunday crowd. I think it should be the opposite. More important than me, God thinks it should be the opposite.

God is a holy God and He wants His family to be pure as well. It's not that God wants to keep something from us, it's that He wants something for us.

Purity validates the message the church is speaking. So when this couple tries to lie to the Holy Spirit and deceive everyone, God strikes them down. God wants a pure church. That is the first feature God is looking for in His church.

The second feature that marked the church is...

POWER

Look with me in Acts 5:12 and following. **12** The apostles performed many signs and wonders among the people. And all the believers used to meet together in Solomon's Colonnade. **13** No one else dared join them, even though they were highly regarded by the people. **14** Nevertheless, more and more men and women believed in the Lord and were added to their number. **15** As a result, people brought the sick into the streets and laid them on beds and mats so that at least Peter's shadow might fall on some of them as he passed by. **16** Crowds gathered also from the towns around Jerusalem, bringing their sick and those tormented by impure spirits, and all of them were healed."

Isn't this incredible! When the church is pure it makes an impact.

Jesus had told the apostles they would have power when they became His witnesses, and Jesus is keeping that promise. Incredible events were taking place to validate the apostles message. People were hoping that Peter's shadow would fall on them and they could be healed. Huge crowds are showing up because of God's power being displayed in the life of the church in Jerusalem.

But as we've back in chapter 4, when the apostles grow in popularity and have large crowds following them, it causes the religious leaders to become jealous. Which brings me to the third feature that marks God's church...

PERSECUTION

It begins in verse 17. “**17** Then the high priest and all his associates, who were members of the party of the Sadducees, were filled with jealousy. **18** They arrested the apostles and put them in the public jail.”

We’ve talked before that persecution for the church is to be expected. We shouldn’t be caught off guard when people reject us or mistreat us because we follow Jesus. Persecution is to be expected. It is inevitable.

Jesus is a threat to these leaders, the Sadducees. They think they silenced Jesus, but not His followers are even worse. The Sadducees are in danger of losing their power. So they throw the apostles in jail. But look at what God does...

19 But during the night an angel of the Lord opened the doors of the jail and brought them out. **20** “Go, stand in the temple courts,” he said, “and tell the people all about this new life.” **21** At daybreak they entered the temple courts, as they had been told, and began to teach the people.

I’ve mentioned a couple weeks ago the Sadducees didn’t believe in resurrection. That’s why they were Sad - you - see. But another aspect to their theology was they did not believe in angels. So don’t tell me God doesn’t have a sense of humor. God sends an angel to set the guys free who are preaching about a resurrected Jesus.

And once released, the apostles did not go into hiding. They went right back to where they were and shared the message of Jesus. They were bold. They shared the message of new life found in Jesus.

Of course, the Sadducees have no idea yet this has taken place. They’re gearing up for their court day and send for the apostles.

When the high priest and his associates arrived, they called together the Sanhedrin—the full assembly of the elders of Israel—and sent to the jail for the apostles. **22** But on arriving at the jail, the officers did not find them there. So they went back and reported, **23** “We found the jail securely locked, with the guards standing at the doors; but when we opened them, we found no one inside.” **24** On hearing this report, the captain of the temple guard and the chief priests were at a loss, wondering what this might lead to.

I think some of them probably had flashbacks to Easter... we guarded Jesus’ tomb too, and that didn’t work out so well for us. But what is this going to lead to...

I mean, we’re talking about the Supreme Court of Israel here. They are so used to being in control, they don’t know what to think.

It’s like they’ve been given a birthday cake with the candles you cannot blow out. They just keep trying and nothing is working!

Of course, the news eventually gets back to them in verse 25:

25 Then someone came and said, “Look! The men you put in jail are standing in the temple courts teaching the people.” 26 At that, the captain went with his officers and brought the apostles. They did not use force, because they feared that the people would stone them.

I mean, the crowd loves these guys. And it had to be an obvious miracle for them to be free from prison! So there’s no way these soldiers want to get rough with the apostles. They just want to get them peacefully from the temple to the courtroom.

Once they’re back in court, the high priest questions them.

27 The apostles were brought in and made to appear before the Sanhedrin to be questioned by the high priest. 28 “We gave you strict orders not to teach in this name,” he said. “Yet you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching and are determined to make us guilty of this man’s blood.”

I think this is ironic because what was one thing the people said at Jesus’ crucifixion? We read it in Matthew 27...

23 “Why? What crime has he committed?” asked Pilate.

But they shouted all the louder, “Crucify him!”

24 When Pilate saw that he was getting nowhere, but that instead an uproar was starting, he took water and washed his hands in front of the crowd. “I am innocent of this man’s blood,” he said. “It is your responsibility!”

25 All the people answered, “His blood is on us and on our children!”

Now, all of a sudden, they don’t want to be responsible. Instead, they just want to stay in control and can’t believe the apostles are still preaching about Jesus.

But that brings us to the fourth feature...

PERSISTENCE

The threats and even arrest did not scare the apostles. They were persistent. They continued to preach the message of Jesus.

So when the high priest says, “We gave you strict orders not to teach in this name,” he said. “Yet you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching and are determined to make us guilty of this man’s blood.” Peter is bold and fires right back.

29 Peter and the other apostles replied: “We must obey God rather than human beings! 30 The God of our ancestors raised Jesus from the dead—whom you killed by hanging him on a cross. 31 God exalted him to his own right hand as Prince and Savior that he might bring Israel to repentance and forgive their sins. 32 We are witnesses of these things, and so is the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey him.”

Boom! First of all, we answer to ultimately to God, not you. Secondly, you want to get away with it, but everyone knows you killed Jesus by hanging Him on a cross! So we will not be silent.

Talk about persistence. Peter is preaching the gospel to the people commanding him to stop. He's not saying, "Well, as soon as I get out of your presence, I'm going to give this message somewhere else." He's giving it right back in their faces.

He is persistent... but it is because Peter was also speaking from personal experience. Isn't that what he said in verse 32? "We are witnesses of these things."

Being with Jesus had transformed Peter. Peter used to be a coward. Peter used to be a liar. Peter used to be wishy-washy. But now... Peter is persistent. He is bold... he is changed. And he cannot help but speak of what God has done in his life.

We have one more week in this series on Acts, and then we're going to change it up and talk about finding your way back to God. It's a series where we are going to look at the different "wake up calls" we experience and how God transforms our lives. I'm really hoping some of you will be willing to share the difference God has made in your life during this series. Because the church God is looking for is one marked by persistence... and they cannot help but talk about what they've seen and heard.

There's one more feature we need to consider about the church, and it's the word...

PROVIDENCE

Providence means God is ultimately in control of the circumstances. I believe God gives us free will to make choices, but any choice we make will not show out what God has decided to be done in this world.

For example, Jesus being born in Bethlehem was something the Providence of God had decided would take place. There was nothing going to stop that from happening. That's why Galatians 4:4 says, "**4** But when the set time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, **5** to redeem those under the law, that we might receive adoption to sonship." There was a set time in the providence of God.

The church should be marked by purity, power, persecution and persistence... but we also have a faith that is fully confident in the providence of God. God is ultimately in control. Whether good or bad happens, we can be confident knowing God is in control.

Check out what happens at the end of the chapter.

33 When they heard this, they were furious and wanted to put them to death. **34** But a Pharisee named Gamaliel, a teacher of the law, who was honored by all the people, stood up in the Sanhedrin and ordered that the men be put outside for a little while. **35** Then he addressed the Sanhedrin: "Men of Israel, consider carefully what you intend to do to these men. **36** Some time ago Theudas appeared, claiming to be somebody, and about four hundred men rallied to him. He was killed, all his followers were dispersed, and it all came to nothing. **37** After him, Judas the Galilean appeared in the days of the census and led a band of people in revolt. He too was killed, and all his followers were scattered. **38** Therefore, in the present case I advise you: Leave these men alone! Let them go! For if their purpose or activity is of human origin, it will fail. **39** But if it is from God, you will not be able to stop these men; you will only find yourselves fighting against God."

This is providence... Gamaliel makes a speech asking them to reconsider their ways so they are not fighting against God. And his speech is effective.

40 His speech persuaded them. They called the apostles in and had them flogged. Then they ordered them not to speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go.

Basically they decide to rough the apostles up in hopes this will deter them from preaching anymore. And with most people that would probably work, but not these guys.

Look at verse 41: “**41** The apostles left the Sanhedrin, rejoicing because they had been counted worthy of suffering disgrace for the Name. **42** Day after day, in the temple courts and from house to house, they never stopped teaching and proclaiming the good news that Jesus is the Messiah.”

They rejoiced because they could suffer for Jesus.

We need to be careful how we judge success... not everything in the providence of God looks successful in our eyes. Jesus being put to death on the cross doesn't look successful. Being arrested and beaten for your faith doesn't look successful.

But being a church that is pure, powerful, persecuted and persistent is a church God looks at and says, “I want to use you for my glory.”

I asked at the beginning of the sermon... Who's side are you on?

If you knew your team would appear to look like it was losing for 3 quarters, but will have a dramatic comeback in the 4th to win the Super Bowl, wouldn't you want to cheer for your team? Wouldn't you want to keep your jersey on, even if others in the crowd are taunting you?

Let's be pure, let's allow God's power to work in our lives, let's anticipate persecution, and let's be persistent, trusting in the providence of God that WE WIN IN THE END!

COMMUNION

(Video after prayer)